DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 507 CS 507 487

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TITLE Television by Children in Kenya.
PUB DATE 24 May 91
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (41st, Chicago, IL, May 23-27, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Television; Communication Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; *Mass Media Role; *Programing (Broadcast); *Student Participation; Student Projects
IDENTIFIERS *Kenya; Research Suggestions; Television Access

ABSTRACT

There are two categories of children's television in Kenya: television "for" children, most of which is imported, and television "by" children, all of which is produced in Kenya. Most of the television by children is produced and broadcast by Voice of Kenya television, much of it made up of programs growing out of extra-curricular activities at primary and secondary schools, where students put together programs of songs, poetry, recitation, riddles, skits, and plays, often dealing with contemporary issues. In the process of putting together such shows, children: (1) learned their nation's history from the legends and stories gathered from their elders; (2) discussed contemporary problems and considered how to handle them; (3) learned how to express themselves; (4) practiced English and Swahili, languages studied in school, but not necessarily spoken at home; and (5) learned that a successful project requires individual responsibility and group cooperation. In addition, the programming helped to build a national culture as children of different ethnic backgrounds could learn that they spoke a common language and shared common aspirations. Centralized production facilities and lack of equipment and transportation meant that programs tended to reflect the interests of urban, rather than rural, youth. It would be interesting to find out how widespread the phenomenon of television by children is, and whether it is typically found in association with particular kinds of political ideology or economic circumstances. In addition, researchers could explore the relationship between television by children and dominant national ideologies, to see whether the material reinforces or challenges dominant attitudes and values. (Twenty-six references are attached.) (PRA)

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TELEVISION BY CHILDREN IN KENYA

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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

Chicago
May 24, 1991

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Children's television in the United States is typically television for children. Whether they are animated cartoons, Muppets, or variety shows hosted by kindly adults, children's television programs are made expressly for children by adults who are professional actors, script writers, and animators. Even though there is scarcely an American child who has not performed in an impromptu backyard skit or who has not had a part in a school play or Sunday school pageant, U.S. television has not drawn upon the energies and talents of its young people to meet the demand for children's television. In Kenya, the situation is quite different. Indigenous children's television is almost entirely television by children, not children who are professional actors but ordinary school children.

This paper is a preliminary look at that programming. It is largely descriptive with some thoughts about directions future research might take. The material presented here is primarily taken from interviews with Voice of Kenya staff conducted in Nariobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu in 1983 and 1984[1]. Since that time, responsibility for the nation's broadcasting service, the Voice of Kenya (VOK), has been transferred from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to a parastatal, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, and an independent, subscription television service, the Kenya Television Network (KTN), has been established (Heath, 1990). It is likely that in the long run

[1] Persons interviewed include: Elulia Namai, Controller of Television, Nairobi; Greg Adambo, Producer/Director VOK-TV, Nairobi; Henry Kombe, Producer Children's programs, VOK-TV, Mombasa; Dolly Shikuku, Producer Children's programs, VOK Radio, Kisumu; Charles Kerich, Head Western Vernacular Service, Kisumu.

these structural changes will affect children's programs; however, recent TV schedules in Kenyan newspapers suggest that substantive changes have not yet been made.

The VOK is considered to be a public service system. Until the spring of 1990 when the KTN was launched, it was the only broadcasting service in the country. The VOK operated three radio services and one television channel with studios in Nairobi and Mombasa. Except for a nightly 15 minute segment of coastal news, all transmission originated in Nairobi. Microwave links to transmitters at Mazeras near Mombasa, Nyeri, and Timboroa made television service potentially available to about 25 percent of the population (Heath, 1986: 218). In fact, the number of people with access to television in Kenya is quite small. In 1984 there were only 8,600 licensed television sets with an estimated half a million viewers; by 1988 the number of licensed sets had increased to 22,900 (Kenya, Economic Survey 1989: 146) which suggests a possible audience of one to one and a half million viewers out of a population of 20 million.

Before the KBC was established in 1989, the VOK was funded entirely by government appropriations. Time was sold to advertisers but revenues were paid directly to the national treasury. As a rule, annual appropriations equalled the revenues raised by the VOK the previous year. Billings for television ads in the early 1980s came to about 80 percent of the amount appropriated for television (L2.5 million in FY 1983; revenues from billings for radio ads and permits made up the balance (Heath, 1986). Advertising rates were low by international

standards and there was little incentive for VOK staff to increase sales. Moreover, there was little interest on the part of advertisers in television (Jouet, 1984) probably because of the small audience. Children's television programs were not sponsored but there were occasional spot ads for such items as candy, soft drinks and toothpaste between but not in the middle of shows. There were no commercials associated with children's radio. Candy manufacturers had expressed interest but had been turned down (Shikuku, 1983).

There are two broad categories of children's television in Kenya: television *for* children most of which is imported and television *by* children all of which is produced in Kenya. At the present, the KTN offers only 30 minutes of programming for children all of which is imported. The KBC's Voice of Kenya devotes 110 minutes a day (some what more on weekends) to children's programs. About 30 minutes of this consists of imported cartoons or dramas such as "Little House on the Prairie" (1983) or "Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys" (1990). The remainder of the time is devoted to local productions. These include "purely educational" programs such as quiz shows, public speaking contests, and debates in which the participants are all school children. These events are organized by the Nairobi Department of Education in cooperation with VOK producers. They are associated with academic subjects and are intended to encourage scholarship and the art of public speaking--in English and Swahili, the national language. Television *by* children also includes plays performed at annual Schools Drama Festivals which

have been deemed "suitable for airing" by VOK staff. A third type of programs grow out of extra-curricular activities at primary and secondary schools. It is these that are of particular interest here.

The Kenyan educational curriculum includes time for "games" or activities such as drama, singing, story telling, and dancing. Under the guidance of teachers in charge of these activities, children put together programs that may include songs, poetry recitation, riddles, skits, and plays. The material is drawn from a number of sources. Children are encouraged to gather stories and riddles from their parents and grandparents. Teachers may write a play or adapt a story from a reader, or the children themselves may improvise a humorous skit or a play dealing with a contemporary social issues such as drunken parents or coffee smuggling. For example, a play by girls at Loreto High School in Nairobi that I viewed in 1983 (an election year) dealt with the death of a chief and the need to select a successor who would serve the people well. Although set in the pre-colonial past and employing traditional cultural elements such as praise songs and dances, respectful formal speech suitable for public meetings, and agreement by consensus, the play had clear relevance to the present. Candidates for the chieftaincy were asked what they would do in the event of pestilence, what they would do if they were asked to lead the people into war, and how they would handle an invasion. The answers were instructive. The favored candidate said that he would quarantine those affected by the disease, act to store food and to protect women and children in the event of

war, and seek assistance from outside in the event of an invasion (VOK-TV, 12/17/83). Another instance in which a traditional setting and social values were employed to dramatize contemporary social ills was a play by upper primary school children that portrayed the triumph of virtuous villagers over a traitorous chief and drunken enemies (VOK-TV, 12/1/83).

"Kipindi cha Watoto" (Children's Program) as this program was called for years2 was educative in many respects. In the process of putting together a show, children learned their nation's history from the legends and stories gathered from their elders. They discussed contemporary problems and considered how to handle them. They learned how to express themselves and to articulate their thoughts. And, they practiced English and Swahili, languages studied in school but not necessarily spoken at home. Perhaps most important, the young performers learned that a successful project requires individual responsibility, be it for props or lines, and group cooperation, values shared by educators the world over but especially important in a young, "developing" nation. "Kipindi cha Watoto" was educational for its viewers as well. Viewers in Central Province could learn the stories and songs of the people on the coast; young Kenyans from different ethnic backgrounds could learn that they spoke a common language and shared common aspirations.

Children's programs were produced in Nairobi and Mombasa. Because "Kipindi cha Watoto" was regarded as a "starters"

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2 Recent television schedules indicate that program now has a livelier, more sophisticated name, "Zama Zetu" (Our Time).

program, young, inexperienced producers were generally assigned to the program (Kombe, 1984). According to Debrah Ogazuma (1990), that used to be the attitude in Nigeria too which often meant assigning such programs to female producers. However, as national leaders and educators have come to recognize the importance of early education to a child's development and the importance of children to the future of the nation, children's television production in Nigeria has come to be regarded as a "special creative field...and the status of the Producer/Director of children's programmes [has] improved considerably" (Ogazuma, 1990b).

In some cases, schools that have a program they would like to have aired contact the VOK. Alternatively, the producer may initiate contacts with municipal school authorities. The VOK has found that once one school in a district appears on television, other schools clamor to have a similar opportunity. On the other hand, there are schools that never contact the VOK and reject VOK overtures. VOK staff regarded those institutions as "selfish" because they were "not willing to share" their talents via the media.

Material for the children's programs was generally taped in the studios. The Mombasa station had no outside broadcast van. Although there was such equipment in Nairobi, it was almost always needed to cover political events. Occasionally a VOK van was sent to cover an agricultural fair in an outlying province and children's television producers would go along to record material for use on "Kipindi cha Watoto." It was apparent in

1984 that there were fewer and fewer such opportunities as more and more VOK vehicles broke down and were not repaired for lack of funds.

The VOK covered the cost of transporting the children to the studio and, in the case of children coming from far away, accommodations, possibly in a church basement, were arranged. Because of the cost of transportion--for producers working with the schools as well as for bringing the children to the city, the schools that participate in the programs were most often located in or near Nairobi or Mombasa. Not surprisingly, the programs were likely to reflect the interests, attitudes, and tastes of urban young people which VOK staff admitted were quite different from those of rural youth.

Centralized production facilities and lack of equipment and transportation affected children's television in other ways. For example, in the years when the Schools Drama Festival was not held in Nairobi, the VOK was unable to tape performances unless they were held outside where there was sufficient light. Because the VOK could not afford to bring all the contestants to the city, the drama program was temporarily discontinued until the festival was held in Nairobi where performances could be taped in the nearby studios.

This brief description of television *by* children in Kenya suggest a number of avenues for further research. First, it would be interesting to know how wide spread this phenomenon is and whether it is typically found in association with particular kinds of political ideology or economic circumstances.

Preliminary research has turned up a few leads that I think are worth following.

For starters, the VOK-TV's "Kipindi cha Watoto" is clearly a spin off from a radio program of the same name which aired at 8:30 Saturday morning on the National (Swahili) Service. Producer/presenter Dolly Shikuku was entirely responsible for that program. She made the arrangements with the schools, rehearsed the children and worked with them to put material gathered from parents and grandparents into good Swahili. At the time of my interview with her in December 1983, Ms. Shikuku had been doing this program for ten years. In the early days, she had gone "all over the country" but, more recently, she had been limited to the Western Province, where she was based, due to the lack of funds for transport. According to Ms. Shikuku, the program was very popular with the schools and well liked by listeners--adults as well as children. The program was educative as well as entertaining; children learned from the stories they gathered and told, and they gained greater competence in Swahili. Moreover, she said "the program is really a means of building a national culture" as people all over the country discovered that they shared similar tales, jokes, and songs (Shikuku, 1983).

Television *by* children is also an important feature of children's television in Nigeria where the objectives of such programming are

> the inculcation of moral values, the development of children's intellect and creative ability, the teaching of Nigerian folklore as well as science and technology...the development of a fair and just society and the spirit of self-help and self-reliance... (Ogazuma, 1990b).

According to Debrah Ogazuma, Producer/Director Nigerian Television Authority, a television production by school children typically "involves the whole community" and is a "wonderful experience for the youth" (Ogazuma, 1990a). Not only do youthful participants gain some understanding of the technology and techniques of television production (the sort of understanding advocates of Media Literacy have argued for in the U.S.), they gain immeasurably in character development and self-confidence (Ogazuma, 1990b). Ms. Ogazuma also confirmed my hunch that using the energies and talents of school children is an inexpensive way of meeting the demand for indigenous programming.

The fact that Kenya and Nigeria have adopted similar strategies, informed by similar philosophies, suggests that participation of children in television may by found elsewhere on the continent especially in former British colonies. Unfortunately, children's broadcasting in Africa, as opposed to Schools Broadcasts, has been virtually ignored by scholars in the field (e.g. Head (1974), Mytton (1983), Katz & Wedell (1977), Tomaselli, et al (1989) who have been more interested in detailing technical features, structural arrangements, and relations between broadcasting institutions and the state. Even African communications scholars who advocate restructuring national media systems so that they can facilitate "true" development (e.g. Alot, 1982, Moemeka, 1981, Ng'wanakilala, 1981; in Wedell, 1986) have failed to consider the role of children's radio and television in the development and nation building processes. Rather, they have confined their discussions of what

Katz and Wedell (1977) call "extensive educational broadcasting" (121) to broadcasts targeted to or involving the participation of adults. Isaac Obeng-Quaidoo (1985) discusses vernacular radio programs for young Ghanaians, but his description suggests that these were programs *for* young people rather than programs *by* them although some use was apparently made of material collected from people in the towns and villages. The connection between the practice of touring the country-side to collect "ethnic" music begun in the 1940s by Peter Frankel (Frankel, 1959) and programs like "Kipindi cha Watoto" should be explored.

Another useful lead is Donald Browne's observation that radio in the German Democratic Republic included "a great deal of programming for and by children from preschoolers to teenagers" (1989, 236-7). These programs incorporate interviews conducted by teenagers and music performed by children and teens.

This fragmentary evidence suggests that television *by* children in Africa might to be traced to three sources: ethnomusicologist/broadcasters like Peter Frankel in Rhodesia and Francis Bebey in West Africa who obtained broadcast material by recording performances of musicians and story tellers in "natural" or "traditional" settings such as harvest festivals, weddings, and circumcision ceremonies; modernization and nation building theories that urged the use of modern mass media to foster a sense of national identity and inspire commitment to national development (e.g. Apter, 1965; Lerner, 1958; Pye, 1966; Rogers, 1969; Schramm, 1964); and economic necessity.

A second, related line of inquiry would be to explore the relationship between television *by* children and dominant national ideologies. Does the material children work up reinforce dominant attitudes and values or does it challenge and question them?

A very casual review of television *by* children in Kenya suggests that the programs do reflect values to be found in official pronouncements and policy statements3: respect for authority, the *harambee* (let's pull together) spirit, and responsible citizenship. One wonders whether these values appeared "spontaneously" in the work of the children or whether they were written in by teachers or producer/directors. Queries about responsibility for the ideological content of children's programs were met with vague response such as "as civil servants we [teachers and VOK staff] know what is acceptable." As there were specific criteria for scripts for TV dramas, there may have been specific criteria for children's programs although no one produced or referred to a written policy. On the other hand, it may be that teachers and broadcasters as well as children from relatively urban areas who were the chief participants in the programs do in fact share a common set of values, values engendered by the schools they attended, the mainstream churches to which they belong, and the media to which they as urbanites are regularly exposed.

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3 Speeches by President Moi on national holidays such as Madaraka (self-government) Day and Uhuru (independence) Day and national five year development plans provide clear and consistent statements of a national ideology.

The urban bias of the children's programs has been noted. While this bias is consistent with much of Kenyan public policy, it is inconsistent with current national development plans that speak to the need to "redress and reshape those previous policies and strategies which...concentrated more economic activities in major towns at the expense of rural areas..."(Kenya, 1989:33). It would be interesting to see whether children's programs in the next decade will reflect the new focus. (Indeed, it will be interesting to see if a substantive shift in public policy is in fact made.) One wonders whether the KBC with its mandate to operate according to commercial principals will find the means and commitment to correct the urban bias of its programs or whether the new structure will further entrench old patterns.

The very notion that television programs that reach less than a tenth of the population can be a nation building tool is problematic. Although I was assured that when a community knows its school will appear on television, efforts are made to rent a television set or to view the program at a neighbor's house, there was no indication that similar efforts are made to see programs from other schools. On the other hand, the principal value in television or radio *by* children may not be the product as much as the process by which material is collected and transformed into a production. As noted above, this process requires individual initiative, leadership and responsibility as well as group cooperation and consensus, skills that are undeniably useful in building a nation. Equally valuable, according to VOK personnel, participants learn that privilege

(and the educated person is still a privileged person in Africa) carries with it the responsibility to return something to the community which gave you that privilege. This may be an idealistic notion, but it is not unlike the idea current in American schools that children should be encouraged (if not required) to perform some sort of voluntary community service. Volunteerism is an essential component of Kenyan development strategies (Kenya, 1983:57; Kenya, 1989:38). Seen from this perspective television *by* children may indeed be a useful aspect of the state's development strategy.

There are numerous other issues to pursue including consideration of the impact the KTN with its line-up of slick American and European programs will have on KBC programs in general and children's programs in particular. Finally, echoing Donald Browne's reaction to Eastern European broadcasting, we might consider that the model of children's television adopted by Kenya and Nigeria is worth emulation "especially in its varied approaches to inducing active participation on the part of young viewers" (Browne, 1989:245).

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